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man, Chandler Robbins

Pamphlet

DR. GILMAN'S
INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

DELIVERED NOV. 6, 1840.

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

TO THE

STUDENTS IN MEDICINE

OF THE

COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS

OF THE

UNIVERSITY

OF THE STATE OF NEW-YORK.

Delivered Nov. 6, 1840.

By CHANDLER R. GILMAN, M. D.

LECTURER ON OBSTETRICS AND THE DISEASES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED BY THE STUDENTS.

1840.

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NEW-YORK, November 7, 1840.

SIR,

At a meeting of the Students of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New-York, held at the College, on Friday, Nov. 6, 1840, it was, on motion of Mr. Hull, unanimously

Resolved, That a Committee of four, with the Chairman and Secretary, be appointed to wait on you, to request a copy of your very appropriate Introductory Address for publication.

The Committee take more than ordinary pleasure in being permitted to communicate to you the wishes of the class, viewing as they do the chaste, flowing, and scholar-like diction of your Introductory Address, together with its agreeable delivery, as emblematical of the excellence of the ensuing course of lectures. That you may succeed (as doubtless you will) in giving full and entire satisfaction to the Trustees and Faculty of the College, as well as to the Students generally, is the sincere desire of

Your obedient servants,

A. COOKE HULL, RICHARD H. COOLIDGE, HENRY F. QUACKENBOS, FRED. J. PAINTER, WM. R. WAGSTAFF, <i>Chairman</i> , PHILIP A. DAVENPORT, <i>Secretary</i> .	}	Committee.
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TO CHANDLER R. GILMAN, M. D.
Lecturer on Obstetrics, &c.

NEW-YORK, November 9, 1840.

GENTLEMEN,

Your letter, communicating the proceedings of a meeting of the Students of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, held Nov. 6, 1840, was duly received.

The lecture, of which you speak in such flattering terms, was prepared simply and solely to afford you pleasure, and, if possible, profit. If your pleasure in it will be increased by its publication, it is entirely at your service.

For the very kind manner in which you wish me success in my new undertaking, be pleased to accept my cordial thanks. Be assured that no efforts of mine shall be wanting to realize your flattering anticipations. I remain, Gentlemen,

Yours, truly,

CHANDLER R. GILMAN.

TO MESSRS. A. COOKE HULL, " " RICHARD H. COOLIDGE, " " HENRY F. QUACKENBOS, " " FRED. J. PAINTER, " " WM. R. WAGSTAFF, <i>Chairman</i> . " " PHILIP A. DAVENPORT, <i>Secretary</i> .	}	Committee,
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INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

MR. PRESIDENT—GENTLEMEN :

By the kind confidence of the Trustees, I appear before you this day as lecturer on Obstetrics and the Diseases of Women and Children in this College.

It is with no ordinary satisfaction that I find myself thus honourably associated with such a faculty as ours, among whom I recognise early and highly valued professional friends ; and for this honour I beg leave to offer to you, Mr. President, and to the Board of Trustees, my cordial and hearty thanks.

Thanks, however, do but poorly pay our obligations. I shall strive most unremittingly to afford to you, sir, and to the Board, the only return for your kindness, which, as I am assured you desire, by a faithful, diligent and zealous performance of the duties you have assigned me.

With the importance of those duties to the institution over which you so worthily preside, and to the profession in which we all delight to labour, I am deeply impressed, and in this view of them, sensible of my own limited fitness, I receive the

honourable and responsible office you have conferred upon me, with a pride which is deeply mingled with humility.

The first duty which devolves upon a public teacher of medicine is, by an introductory address, to endeavour to create in the minds of his pupils such an interest in the subject of his course as will excite them to a zealous and persevering study of it. That such incitements to exertion are necessary, will be doubted by no one who is acquainted with the amount of the labour required, with the discouraging and often disgusting circumstances under which that labour is to be performed, and the number and character of the obstacles to be overcome, before the student can tread even the threshold of his profession. And do his difficulties cease, are his labours to be remitted, when that threshold is passed? Far otherwise. These early difficulties are soon forgotten, but it is in the countless cares, anxieties, fatigues and annoyances, which beset the practitioner of physic, from the first moment, when a young graduate, he sits in his office waiting and hoping for business, to the last, when an old man, his strength exhausted by fatigue, his health broken by ex-

posure, his spirit vexed by disappointment or worn by care, he finds rest from his labours in the quiet of the grave.

And should encouragement be refused, should even stimulants to exertion be denied to those who are entering on a course like this? Surely not! But where are they to be found? Where are the motives strong enough to tempt any one to enter voluntarily on a youth of study, only to prepare himself for a life of toil?

Other paths are open. The law tempts him with early opportunities of public display and a ready and early passage to the high honours of political life. Commerce pours out before him her golden treasures, and bids him remember that his country is one whose merchants are princes. Or if he rather choose a calm and quiet course through life, agriculture points to her waving fields and yellow harvests, her green retreats and sunny glades, and says—*“Happiness is here.”*

And what has medical science to offer that she should enter into a competition with these? She cannot promise opportunities of public display, for hers are emphatically private, and

often confidential duties. She cannot even speak of political honours, for no profession is, from its very nature, more alien from political strife than the medical. Can she rival commerce in the golden gains by which her votaries are repaid? Too often is the physician, for his toil, his care, his time, his skill — shall I say repaid? — were it not better to say insulted? — a pittance which a day-labourer would scarce envy. Medicine cannot name peaceful ease and quiet contentment among her attractions; but in their stead must threaten, never-ending toils;—anxieties to which the most stoical cannot remain insensible, nor the most patient always endure without repining.

And has she nothing more to offer to her adorers? Is toil, is care, is wasted strength, is broken health, is poverty, is premature old age, the only dowry she brings? Not so. With poverty she brings a wealth, with care a happiness. She can make the poorest of us rich in the consciousness of well-performed duties, and our most anxious hours happy in the luxury of doing good.

These, students of medicine, are the rich rewards by which you are to be excited to dili-

gence and zeal in the study of your profession. They belong, however, alike to each and every branch of the healing art.

And has not the particular department in which I shall have the honour to direct your efforts its peculiar attractions. Its requirements are high: to thorough knowledge of general principles must be added a perfect familiarity with minute details; and these, in their application to practice, must be regulated and guided by a presence of mind, which no sudden danger can disturb, a fertility of recourse which no emergencies can exhaust, and above all, a patience, on which neither time nor fatigue, nor the repinings of friends, nor, hardest of all to resist, the entreaties of suffering, can produce any effect.

These are the requirements of Obstetric medicine — her toils are not less, and her anxieties are greater. And has she no special reward, no peculiar prize for her votaries? She has. Their toils are in the cause of woman, and woman's ardent gratitude and woman's unfailing confidence are their abundant reward. It is our happy lot to repay in part the incalculable debt which man owes to woman — to

woman, too often the sport of his wayward passions, by his licentiousness made a plaything, by his brutality a slave. But when left to the guidance of her own purer and better nature, ever ready to take that place by the side of man which their common Creator assigned to her, and become his best friend—often his wisest, because always his most disinterested, adviser ; in short, to become what God himself has called her, *a help mete for man*.

There have not, I know, been wanting, in every age, and there are not wanting in our own, those who would willingly lure woman from this her good and happy sphere, to make her man's rival. But such efforts are too directly in opposition to the nature of woman, ever to obtain more than that temporary and limited success which novelty insures to any and to everything.

The character and extent of woman's duties are too clearly marked out by *Him* who so admirably fitted her to perform them. Nor is His wisdom and His benevolence less clearly manifested in that, while by her mental and physical organization He has admirably adapted her for one sphere, He has not less distinctly disqualified her for the other.

To be convinced of this, we need scarce do more than cast a glance at the external configuration of the two sexes. Woman man's rival! Mark the modest lowliness of her stature. See the slender and well-rounded limbs, the small flexible joints, the smooth and polished skin, the graceful curve in which every outline flows. Now contrast this with man. His towering height, his broad chest, his large and muscular limbs, his rough and hirsute skin, the angularity and squareness of his figure. In woman everywhere power is sacrificed to grace, and strength to beauty. She is a being to love and be beloved, to cherish and be cherished; at once to feel, and be herself the object of all the soft and tender emotions.

And was this being, thus curiously and delicately framed, created to be man's rival? to arrogate to herself his privileges, attempt his duties, or cope with him in power? Not so. His rival she can never be; but in her own sphere she can be something better than his equal, something nobler than his rival. Man's inferior in strength and courage, she leans on him for support, she looks to him for protection.

But the arm is strengthened when woman leans upon it, the courage rises when woman is to be protected.

Above all, and best of all, to woman is assigned by her Creator, a chief and prevailing part in the continuance of the species. This is her great duty. In this all her powers, her faculties, her feelings and her passions concentrate. To this every other duty and every other feeling is secondary. The study of her mental and physical organization will convince any one that this is the great duty of woman.

On this subject I shall, at a future day, enter into minute detail, for the present, a slight sketch of the peculiarities of the female system (aside from the strictly sexual organs) will suffice.

We have already spoken of her external configuration, and contrasted it with that of man. But there is one peculiarity, interesting in this point of view, to which I did not then allude. Not only is woman's stature inferior to that of man, but the shape of the figure, as a whole, is essentially and characteristically different. In man we have a broad chest, strongly formed shoulders, with a comparative-

ly small pelvis and narrow hips. In woman, on the contrary, we have the whole trunk longer in proportion than that of man, the chest narrow, the shoulders small, while the hips are large and the pelvis wide. By this peculiarity of formation alone, and if there were no other structural differences, man would possess great advantages in the performance of every variety of labour, and in the power of steady, rapid, and vigorous progression. For all of which advantages woman has compensation only in the wide capacious pelvis, enabling her to bear her precious and well-loved burthen in safety. But woman's duty to her offspring is not alone to carry in her bosom the germ of the future being; she is to afford it nutriment in all that mysterious progress by which a vesicle, so minute that the unassisted eye can scarce detect it, becomes a highly organized, living, moving human being.

For this purpose, and to supply the prodigious drain it makes upon her fluids, the organs of woman are everywhere pervaded by cellular texture which, while, its regular distribution adds much to the beauty of her figure, serves to retain in its minute areola the fluids

which, at the call of nature, are to contribute to the sustenance of the new being ; and these nutrient fluids are preserved from waste by the very limited degree in which exhalation is performed through her fine and delicate skin. It is by this arrangement that women, even the weakest of them, are enabled to support the long-continued and profuse drains upon their system, which are caused by gestation and lactation, while the dryer, though more vigorous system of man, soon succumbs under a much smaller degree of any similar exhausting process.

This abundant supply of nutriment is all that the child requires from his mother during uterine life, for during that time his security is for the most part bound up in her own, and may be made dependent on her own instinct of self-preservation. But the period of foetal life once passed, the child once born, how various and how great are his demands upon a mother's love. Not only must her breast afford him his supply of nutriment, but upon her bosom he seeks his needful rest, it is to him at once a fountain of life and a bed of repose. Upon his mother's watchful care his life de-

pende at almost every moment of his early existence. Her eye must be ever upon him, her ear ever open to his cry.

These kind offices, so essential to the existence of the new-created being, have not been, by the all-wise Creator, left to depend on the moral sense, on the feeling of duty, on expediency, or even on that ordinary parental affection which is common to the two sexes. An impulse to perform them is implanted deep in the heart of woman. It is a part of herself, a necessity of her existence.

Nor is it, as I conceive, difficult to trace much of this moral nature to the peculiar physical organization on which it depends. In woman, an inferiority of the locomotive apparatus, the apparatus of action, of physical labour, is apparent in all its parts. The bones are small and slender, smooth, or nearly so, and capable, from their structure, of resisting only a very moderate amount of violence. The muscular system, throughout its whole extent, has the same general character, delicate in texture, small in size, endowed with great mobility and little power; but it is in the nervous system that the peculiarities of

the female are most marked and have the most prevailing influence on her moral nature. The great nervous centre, the brain, is both absolutely and relatively smaller in woman than in man. But the nerves (the branches from that mighty root) pervade her structure to a much greater extent, and bear a much larger proportion to the rest of her body than they do to that of man. Of the peculiarities in the intimate structure of this system, and of the organs of sense, on which the different degrees of perfection in which their functions are performed, depend, we are profoundly ignorant, and cannot in this respect make a comparison between the two sexes.

But if we adopt for them another mode of study, and without attempting to establish differences of intimate structure, which are too minute for our means of investigation, content ourselves with observing these organs in their exercise, who does not know that quickness of sight, nicety of touch, and delicacy of all the senses, are the acknowledged attributes of woman?

Let us now make a brief summary of the peculiarities in the organization of woman. We

have first an abundant supply of soft and semi-fluid cellular tissue ; we have a muscular and locomotive apparatus possessing great mobility with but little power, a nervous system, wide-spread and largely developed, affording to every part an abundant supply of its influence, and giving to every fibre the highest degree of susceptibility and irritability ; lastly, we have organs of sense, whose functions are performed with a delicacy and quickness to which those of man are strangers. Now with such an organization what mental traits are likely to be associated ?

The abundance of the cellular tissue, by rendering the whole fabric more soft and delicate, contributes to impress a like character of softness and delicacy on the mind ; the weakness of her apparatus of action, while it unfits her for powerful effort or long-continued exertion, has a necessary tendency to give to her mind a character of non-resistance, of passivity, which, under favourable influences, is developed and modified into that habit of self-sacrifice, that readiness to concede, that total absence of selfishness, which is the best trait in the character of the best women. The full

development of the nervous system and its predominance over the cerebral centre, gives to every part a susceptibility so acute, that the impressions made, and the sensations excited, are always of the most vehement character; and these being less under the control of the brain, woman becomes, from the very necessity of her nature, a creature rather of impulse than of reflection, of feeling than of thought, of passion than of reason. Her extreme and easily excited sensibility, when united with the gentleness and softness of her nature, give to her mind a proneness to compassion, to pity, and to tenderness. And such should be the mental character of a mother. For to what other feelings than those of pity, of compassion, and of tenderness, can that most helpless of all beings, a new-born infant, appeal. His powers, his faculties, his organs of sense, are all undeveloped; the lines of humanity are scarce yet traced upon his countenance; he can have no advocate but his own utter helplessness. The first offices of kindness to him must be prompted rather by compassion than by affection; he must be pitied before he can be loved. And well and wisely hath the Fa-

ther of all provided for this the frailest of his works, when he consigned it to woman's prompt compassion, to woman's unfailing and exhaustless tenderness!

Such, students of medicine, is a sketch of woman and her peculiar adaptation to her most important office. It has been brief, for the time would not admit, nor the occasion justify, any amplification of detail; imperfect, for who will say that he is able to do justice to the theme?

✓This interesting being, in the hour of her extremity, will call on you for aid. She appeals to the tenderest, the holiest sympathies of your nature. She is about to become a *mother*—Oh, that sweet word, *mother*! Is there a heart in any bosom here that does not throb thick and fast at the sound? Is there one among you who needs to have counted up before him the infinite debt he owes to his own mother?

Look back on your past life—back, far back, to childhood, if it be possible, to infancy. By your cradle's side she kept her patient vigil. Childhood's sorrows and joys, the rain and sunshine of life's April day, were soothed and

shared by mother's ready sympathy. And as your life advanced, has not her gentle influence been, like a guardian angel, ever present, to check the impulses to evil, and lure you onward in the path of duty. And oh, happy are they to whom, amid the cares and toils of manhood, the Divine mercy has vouchsafed a continuance of the blessed influence of a mother's gentle wisdom. But there are those of us to whom that great blessing has been denied, to whom *mother* is altogether a word of memory. Yet to us—perhaps to us chiefly—it is a holy and a blessed word, recalling, as it does, the thousand tender and grateful recollections of days gone by. To us, nay, to all, woman will not appeal in vain when she bids us, if we love a living, or cherish the memory of a dead mother, to give aid and succour to her in this her hour of trial, “that hour of perilous hope,” as it was beautifully called by one* who, alas! did not survive it. If aid and succour be afforded skilfully, you may hope that, after a few brief hours of suffering, all will be well—the woman's agonies

* Princess Charlotte of England.

all forgotten in the mother's joy. And the husband too, will he not bless you, when all the husband's anxieties and fears are banished, lost, forgotten—in the proud joy of being a father?

This issue may be hoped for, but is there not another that must be feared? The suffering, the apprehension, the alarm, the confusion, the tumult, all are passed. Silence reigns in the lately noisy and agitated household; but it is the stillness of despair! The bird of death, that hovered so far off that scarce the eye of apprehension could catch his figure, a speck in the heaven of hope, has made his fearful stoop, and now in triumph he riots o'er his prey. He who hoped to have been a father is now a lonely and despairing man, and she who should have been a mother, is, for this world, nothing.

All the hopes and joys that clustered round the once happy home, now take their flight. We can almost fancy, that, like the priests of Jerusalem, when the guardian angels of the temple left their charge, we hear the rustling pinions of the departing host, and their wailing cry,

“Let us go hence.”

I will not ask you, students of medicine,

which of these two pictures you would wish to see realized in your own experience. If the question were not a mere mockery, it would be something worse. But let me remind you, that hopes and fears are idle, when they are not efficient stimulants to zeal and industry.

Whatever may be your hopes, your wishes, or your fears, they will not influence the result. Which of these two pictures will be most frequently realized in your experience—whether, in her hour of peril, you are to be to suffering woman the minister of good or evil—whether you will bring to her and to her offspring life or death, and to those around her happiness or misery, will depend mainly on the manner in which the next two or three years of your lives are spent. Improve them, and all will be well. A career of labour, but of honourable and useful labour, is before you. Nor will your labour fail of its appropriate reward. True, your name may not fill the trump of Fame, nor be written on any blood-stained page of your country's history, but it will be graven on the hearts, it will live among the cherished memories of those to whom you have been *God's minister for good*.

It is but a few years since such a one lived and laboured here among us, and well and kindly is he remembered ; for could we forget his venerable form, his mild, benignant countenance, his calm and courteous bearing, yet would the ripe wisdom, the well-digested experience, above all, the unfailing kindness, the perfect uprightness in all the relations of life, which distinguished the late Wright Post of this city, live in the hearts of those who had the advantage and the pleasure of being in any way associated with him. His was a life useful and honourable, a death peaceful and happy, a memory cherished by the wise, and blessed by the good.

A career like his may now be opening to some of you ; but it will only be to those who from the first, from this very hour, resolve to neglect no opportunity of professional advancement, to allow no moment of time to escape them unimproved, in short, to shrink from no amount of needful labour.

But should you choose another and a baser course, to what can a youth of neglected opportunities and wasted hours lead ? To a life of insignificance ? Of uselessness ? This is not

all. The ill-instructed physician is not a mere negation of all that is good, a mere drone in the political hive. He goes forth armed with a power which he must exert. It is not, as I conceive, putting the case too strongly, to say that he goes forth God's minister for evil, God's scourge, his curse upon those whose evil fate leads them to employ him.

Students of medicine, these two courses of life are now placed as alternatives before each one of you—to be useful, to be loved and cherished in life, to be honoured and mourned in death; or to be, on the other hand, not simply a thing of nought, but a thing of evil—not simply a cumberer of the ground, but a poisoner of the soil—not simply a broken staff, but a spear piercing where it should support. Between these two you are now to choose. If a prize like this to be gained, and a fate like that to be avoided, afford not a sufficient stimulus to your industry, no words nor thoughts of mine can supply one.

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